

Family life in Quran and the Cultural Translation Barriers: An Analytical Study of two English Translations: Arberry and Hilali & Khan

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Abstract

The research paper analyzed the translation barriers in the translations of culture-bound expressions in the selected verse No. 34, chapter “Al-Nisa” (The Women) of the Holy Quran. The selected two translations are; The Quran Interpreted (Arberry, 1955), and The Noble Quran: English Translation of the Meanings & Commentary (Taqi-Ud-Deen Al-Hilali & Muhammad Muhsin Khan, 1998). The verse contains cultural expressions regarding family matters, etiquettes, and responsibilities of wife and husband. The translators translated the verse in various ways that may be understood differently in different cultures. The research question is that to what extent the translators succeeded in rendering the cultural expressions to the English community? The new insight in this research is that such critical issues are required to be discussed and clarified in a translation perspective because their mistranslation leads the target readers towards misunderstanding the cultural image of Islamic society. This study applied the strategies devised by Peter Newmark (1988) for the translation of culture-bound words. It, further, described the types of strategies adopted in these two translations to render the culture bound concepts. And finally, the selected translations have been analyzed with findings, recommendations, and conclusions.

Keywords: Qur'an Translation, Culture-specific Words, Translation Strategies

1. Introduction

Culture, being an important part of society, has a deep impact on its language. Therefore, when a translator comes across a translation of a source language into another language, he faces real challenges caused by cultural barriers. If the source language and target language have less cultural differences, the concepts and meanings would be transferred from SL to TL in a comparatively easier way, but, in case of wider differences, the translation process would become a difficult task for a translator.

Arabic and English are the languages which are spoken by people of two different continents with different cultural backgrounds. Therefore, while translating Arabic text into English language more specifically the Quranic text into the English, a translator faces multiple cultural problems. To tackle cultural issues, translation scholars have devised some techniques and strategies which should be taken into consideration to transfer the true meaning of Quranic cultural expressions.

When we come to the translation of religious concepts, we come across various cultural problems while transferring their meanings into a foreign culture. To cope with those problems, we may take benefit from the experience of researchers who have developed procedures and strategies for translating cultural as well as religious concepts and expressions.

1.1 Objectives

The objectives and new insights of the study include the followings:

- to explore and explain the critical issues and some important teachings found in the selected verse.
- to discuss and clarify the translation problems of the cultural expression ‘فاضِرُوبَيْنَ’.

1.2 Research Statement

The study carried out the translational analysis of the serious cultural-bound expressions relating to family life. The action stated through the word (اضربوهن) needs special and critical linguistic, exegetical and cultural explanation.

1.3 Limitation of the Study

This paper deals with the religious and cultural expression ‘فاضِرُوبَيْنَ’ in verse No. 34 of the chapter ‘The Women (Al-Nisa)’ in the Holy Qur’an. Two major Quran Translations include Arberry (Khan & Hilali, 1998). Whereas two other translations i.e. Laleh Bakhtiar and Ahmad Ali have been added for comparison.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Definition of Culture and Translation

It is necessary, before starting the translation of such cultural expressions, to understand the cultural context and the message in source language when used within cultural settings. So, before translating the Quranic cultural terms, the translators must have cultural and contextual knowledge of the source text to render the real cultural background and context to the target readers.

Words and expressions that have their cultural dimensions are known as ‘culture-specific words’. The translation of such terminologies is a part of lexicology (Teresa, 1996, p. 22). The translation scholars have devised various methodologies for handling complex and problematic cultural structures. Keeping this issue in view, this paper deals

with the cultural expression ‘فَأَصْرَبُوهُنَّ’ used in verse no 34 of chapter ‘Al-Nisa’ (The Women) in the Holy Qur’an. Adding to that, the translation of this expression analyzed by applying the procedures and methods suggested by Peter Newmark.

Translation from its beginning and more specifically nowadays is considered a significant mediator between different cultures due to its pivotal role in intercultural aspects of translation studies. We communicate our feelings, concepts, and ideas by using the language we speak. Therefore, it can be found that there is a deep relation between language and culture just like the relation of thought with behavior.

According to Peter Newmark (1988, p. 94), culture can be defined as the way of life, its various aspects and reflections which are distinguished and specified for a community that utilizes a specific language as a mean of expression. From this definition, it is apparent that each community uses its ways of expressions for particular cultural patterns. Therefore, it is the translator who plays a pivotal role by mediating between communities through transcultural translation.

In the current era, translation scholars have focused on cultural knowledge which is very helpful in the translation of cultural expressions. In the last centuries, translators used to deal only with language without paying specific attention towards culture, while, now cultural aspects have attained special attention. Culture provides context to understand a text in its original environment in a better way. Translation scholars defined translation in different ways, as for Peter Newmark, so he defined it as ‘translation is transferring the meaning of a source text into a target text in a way that the author’s intention has not been distorted’ (Newmark, 95, p. 5). After all this discussion, it can be concluded that translation is an effective way to make people understand a foreign culture and concepts. Therefore, effective use of language plays an important role in explaining the culture of different nations.

2.2 Translation Procedures by Peter Newmark

Peter Newmark is a renowned scholar of translation studies, well-known for his scholarly works in translation strategies and procedures. He has written many books and devised various procedures and methods to deal with translation problems. He is of the view that transition is based on, at least, three important pillars which are; culture, language, writer & translator (Newmark, 2001, p. 7). In the book ‘Approaches to Translation’, Newmark devised methods for translating a text into a foreign language.

Peter Newmark (1988, p. 47) recommended eight procedures of translation which have been given below. In the four procedures the focus is on ST and in the other four

procedures, the focus of the translator is on TT. A brief introduction of procedures is as under.

2.2.1 The Word for word Translation

By type of translation, a translator renders the source text into the target text by maintaining the word order of ST and mentioning synonyms in front of each word separately. This method is applied to make the TL text reader understand the literal meaning of SL text.

2.2.2 Literal Translation

In this method, the literal meaning and the nearest equivalents of ST are translated in the TT but the sentence structure and sequence are molded according to the grammatical requirements of the TL. This strategy is useful for the first draft translation before proper translation (Newmark, 1988, p. 45).

2.2.3 Faithful Translation

In this type of translation, a translator tries to reproduce the correct contextual meaning of the source text, following the grammatical structures of the target text. It focuses on the intentions of the ST writer aiming to be faithful to ST.

2.2.4 Adaptation

This type is considered the freest form of translation. In this method source language (SL) culture is converted to the target language (TL) culture, with consequent rewriting of the text, while the themes, plots, and characters remain untouched (Newmark, 1988, p. 46).

2.2.5 Free Translation

This procedure can be used to reproduce and remodel the ST into TT by maintaining the concept of ST and by changing the structure of the sentence, expression, composition, and vocabulary, etc. in the TT.

2.2.6 Idiomatic Translation

This procedure helps in translating the ST idiomatic expressions into TT in simple form maintaining the original concept in ST. Therefore, it is better to render the idea of ST in literary style.

2.2.7 Semantic Translation

In this procedure, a translator renders a text as closely as the syntactic and semantic structures of the target language allow, and he tries to provide the exact contextual meanings of the source language. In this type of translation, the translator limits himself within the cultural setting of the source language and transfer the semantic meanings. (Newmark, 2001, p. 39).

As in semantic translation, a translator remains within source language culture, therefore, it emphasizes the contextual meaning of the original text. The purpose of this type is to create the original tone and flavor of the source language and convey the author's idiolect. Likewise, it preserves the features of a source language and the uniqueness of the original works. Therefore, it is focused that the translator should be faithful to the original author, formal factors and rhetorical devices. (Fingling, 2017, p. 36). This type is more sensitive to the stylistic perspectives of the ST than the above mentioned faithful translation. This method unlike faithful translation allows for the less than 100% fidelity.

2.2.8 Communicative Translation

In this type of translation, a translator renders a text in a way to create on its readers a very close effect as obtained by the source text readers. In this type, the focus of the translator is on the target language reader and his culture (Newmark, 2001, p. 39).

Communicative translation focuses only on the target text (TT) reader so that the cultural elements of a foreign language may be transferred to the target language by focusing on the TT reader. But while translation, a translator should respect the source text as a fundamental source for his work. This procedure emphasizes the effect rather than the content of the source text message, and this effect is equal to the effect obtained by the ST reader. Therefore, considering the receiver's perception, a translator should organize and rearrange the target language structure. So, after this discussion, we can conclude that communicative translation is a reader-oriented translation. (Fingling, 2017, p. 36). In this type of translation, a translator emphasizes on the exact contextual meaning of the ST, so that the language and content are textually acceptable and understandable to the TT reader (Newmark, 1988, p. 47).

2.2.9 Differences and distinctive features of semantic and communicative translation

Semantic translation is an objective approach of translation in which much attention is paid to the exact words. This approach is adopted when it is difficult to understand the connotative meaning of the source text, so, the translator conveys the only

semantic meaning of ST. While communicative translation is a subjective approach of translation where the emphasis is on the reader's reaction to avoid any misunderstanding.

When there happens conflict between content and effect of the source text, the focus of semantic translation is on content rather than the effect whereas communicative is vice versa.

According to Newmark, to consider the effect and simplicity of meaning for target text reader, the communicative meaning is better than the semantic (Newmark, 1988, p. 63-64).

The purpose of the communicative approach is to make the concept of the source text (ST) accessible to the TT readers and to effect his minds. Therefore, it is suitable for serious literature, informative and religious texts.

3. Methodology and Theoretical Framework

As research methodology, analytical and descriptive methods have been followed to carry out the research.

In this study, for analysis and comparison of the translations, the researcher has applied semantic and communicative translation procedures suggested by Peter Newmark for the translation of cultural expressions.

The study tried to bring out the cultural impacts of the selected word on the source text reader and the target text reader caused by the difference in translation. The research has been concluded with the findings of the discussion and analysis.

4. Data Analysis of Translations and Discussion

For analysis the researchers have selected the following verse in which the word (فاضربوهن) has been mentioned:

Arabic part of the Verse;

.... وَاللَّاتِي تَخَافُونَ نُشُوزَهُنَّ فَعِظُوهُنَّ وَاهْجُرُوهُنَّ فِي الْمَضَاجِعِ وَاضْرِبُوهُنَّ فَإِنْ أَطَعْنَكُمْ فَلَا تَبْغُوا عَلَيْهِنَّ سَبِيلًا
(النساء:34).

4.1 Translations of the Verse

Translation No. 1: Hilali & Khan translated the verse as;

“.... As to those women on whose part you see ill-conduct, admonish them (first), (next), refuse to share their beds, (and last) beat them (lightly, if it is useful), but if they return to obedience, seek not against them means (of annoyance)” (Hilali & Khan, 1998, p. 113)

Translation No. 2: Arberry translated it as;

“.... And those you fear may be rebellious admonish; banish them to their couches, and beat them. If they then obey you, look not for any way against them;” (Arberry, 2003, p. 59)

4.1.1 Some other Translations of the Verse with different renderings.

Translation No. 3: Laleh Bakhtiar translated it as;

And those females whose resistance you fear, then admonish them (f) and abandon them (f) in their sleeping places and go away from them (f). Then if they (f) obeyed you, then look not for any way against them (f). (Website 1)

Translation No. 4: Ahmad Ali Translated it as;

As for women you feel are averse, talk to them suavely; then leave them alone in bed (without molesting them) and go to bed with them (when they are willing). If they open out to you, do not seek an excuse for blaming them. (website 1)

4.2. Contextual and Exegetical Explanation

This verse was revealed when a woman came to the Holy Prophet (Peace be upon Him) to complain against his husband then this verse revealed describing the family affairs, etiquettes, and responsibilities (Al-Tabri, p. 37).

Al-Zamakhshari (2009, p. 235) and other exegetes mentioned that if a wife is rebellious, his husband should admonish and advise her and if he could not succeed then he can limit or bound his relation with her and even if this cure could not resolve the problem and she continues her disobedience then he can beat his rebellious wife “in a polite way which may not lead into injury, wound or stain on her skin”. And he should not beat her on the face.

4.3 Views of Islamic Scholars and Jurists

According to jurists and Islamic scholars, it is not allowed to beat rebellious wife absolutely but if admonition and banishment do not result in the solution and good relation only then a husband may beat his rebellious wives. And this punishment should not be for revenge. And it can be in the case when it is expected that this punishment would result in the betterment of relation. And if he beats her and there occurs any stain on skin or injury, she can ask for wergild (دية) (website 2).

4.4 Analysis and Comparison of translations

Through context and with the help of authentic exegeses, we can compare the selected translation according to the methods and procedures devised by Peter Newmark.

4.4.1 Analysis of the Translations

According to the context and the explanation mentioned in the authentic exegeses, it can be seen that the translations which did not follow the lexical, contextual, exegetical, and rhetoric meaning lack these features in the translations.

The analysis of the selected two translations is as under;

4.4.1.1 Arberry

Arberry translated the word 'واضربوهن' by reproducing the same image in the target text and used the words 'and beat them' for translation which is semantic equivalent. He didn't mention further explanation for target language culture. So, he carried out the semantic translation.

4.4.1.2 Hilali & Khan

They translated the word 'واضربوهن' as '(and last) beat them (lightly, if it is useful)'. So by providing literal equivalent, he added explanation within brackets to convey the appropriate meaning for target text reader. So this translation is communicative in which target text reader has been facilitated by providing explanations and minimizing the cultural barrier.

4.4.2 Other Two Translations

4.4.2.1 Laleh's Translation

Laleh translated the word 'واضربوهم', as 'and go away from them' which is not according to the text and with the above mentioned authentic exegeses.

Laleh daughter of an American Muslim woman, keeping in view the American culture that dislikes beating of women, searched for a lexical meaning of the root (ض-ر-ب) that means 'ignore them, or not pay proper attention to them). She superseded the prevailing translations of "beat them" to bring close the American women to the Quran (quoted from her video interview: Laleh Bakhtiar on the Misinterpretation of 4:34 in the Quran (YouTube, 2011, website 3).

4.4.2.2 Ahmad's Translation

Ahmad rendered the word as, 'and go to bed with them (when they are willing)' which is far away from the lexical, semantic, contextual and exegetical meanings.

4.5 Comparison of the Translations

The word 'واضربوهم' describes family affairs regarding the limit of a husband for his wife who disobeys him and disturbs family environment which may destroys family life.

In this verse, the gradual solution for ill relation has been discussed to refrain a husband from taking acute and harsh steps against his wife.

Therefore, the Quran directed the Muslims to advise their wives following the steps and if needed a light beating to save family life can be practiced avoiding an injury, stain on skin or beating on the face (Al-Zamakhshari, 1981, p. 93).

The Quran limited this culture-bound action through sequential steps to save family life from destruction and keeping it in order. And it should be kept in mind that these steps have been mentioned only for those wives who misbehave and disobey their husbands in their legal obligations. Otherwise, it is stated in the Holy Quran clearly that a husband should behave his wife in a very good way even if he is not very much interested in her as in the following verse;

وَعَاشِرُوهُنَّ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ فَإِنْ كَرِهْتُمُوهُنَّ فَعَسَى أَنْ تَكْرَهُوا شَيْئًا وَيَجْعَلَ اللَّهُ فِيهِ خَيْرًا كَثِيرًا. (النساء: 19)

“And live with them honorably. If you dislike them, it may be that you dislike a thing and Allah brings it a great deal of good.” (Hilali & Khan, 1998, p. 110)

Through the above-mentioned clarification and Quranic teachings, it can be said that the word ‘واضربوهن’ has not been used for beating in absolute and general situations and Islam teaches good behaviour with the wife. Therefore, the need for adding an explanation is essential in footnotes to clarify the concept for target text reader.

The translation in which the target text readers and target culture are focused is known as communicative translation. So, Hilali and Khan carried out communicative translation providing the target reader explanatory information whereas Arberry just translated with one of the prevailing semantic meaning i.e. (beating) which gives no cultural background, no exegetical and contextual information. Laleh’s translation kept in consideration the TT culture keeping aside the dominant semantic meaning, contextual background and rejecting all exegetical explanations.

5. Conclusion and Findings

By going through the above-mentioned discussion it can be concluded that:

- 1) All the four translators translated the Quranic-bound term and cultural expression in different linguistic styles.
- 2) Hilali and Khan kept in consideration both the source culture, Quranic texture and the need of the target readers and provided sufficient least words to convey the message.
- 3) Arberry, on the other hand, translated with just a single lexical-semantic word which shows one side of ST culture, with any clue or hints for TT reader to come to the philosophy behind this directive advice.
- 4) Laleh jumped to the TT reader’s culture by taking a lexical meaning which has not been mentioned by any of the exegetes and which is out the context of the verse.
- 5) The fourth translation is the destruction of the ST which at any cost cannot be kept in consideration.
- 6) The discussion shows that Hilali applied the communicative procedure for producing the same effect, giving the full ST cultural meaning.
- 7) Arberry applied the semantic procedure that gives only the one side meaning.

- 8) Laleh applied the method which can be as adaptation, whether she applied the lexical devices for searching the meaning the Arabic root.
- 9) We finally conclude that Hilali and Khan's translation of this cultural-bound expression is better for TT readers to know the actual Arab culture and reformation brought by Islam in the early 7th century where women were sold in the markets, behaved like animals and isolated due to biological menstruations and related matters.

6. Recommendations

After carrying out research on this valuable topic following recommendations are being suggested:

- 1) Further research can also be carried out on the other cultural concepts of the Holy Qur'an.
- 2) A translator of the Holy Quran should be well aware of cultural aspects of the source language text to render the cultural concepts in a way understandable to target text reader.
- 3) He should be well aware of Qur'anic sciences and Its exegeses.
- 4) Use of parenthesis and footnotes are recommended for the translation of cultural and complicated expressions of the Holy Quran, to make the concept and intended meaning accessible to the target text reader.
- 5) It is recommended for a translator of the meaning of the Holy Quran to have proper knowledge of various translation procedures and strategies.
- 6) It is preferred that either the target language should be the native language of a translator or he should have expertise in that language.
- 7) A translator of the Holy Quran should have literature expertise in classical Arabic and religious.
- 8) Teamwork is recommended for translation of the Holy Quran to deal with the difficulties of cultural expressions.
- 9) Traditions ('Ahadith' أحاديث) of the Holy Prophet (PBUH) helps in understanding the intended meaning of the metaphors, therefore, a translator should have a proper introduction of Hadith.
- 10) The religious text like the Holy Quran cannot be translated just depending on rendering the literal meaning, rather there is a need for explanation for TT reader to convey the message.

- 11) While translating the cultural and the jurisprudential concepts, a translator should consult exegeses and the sayings of the Holy Prophet (PBUH) to avoid mistranslation.
- 12) The Quranic instructions for exceptional and special cases cannot be generalized and considered for all cases and consequently should not be misinterpreted.

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